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ABSTRACT

This paper on the interrelations between school desegregation and crisis prevention is presented both as a position paper and as the formulation of the research agenda for the Desegregation Studies Unit, NIE. It has five basic purposes, as follows: (a) identification and definition of the parameters of the issue area; (b) placing the area within the context of the national desegregation efforts; (c) presenting the rationale for the inclusion of crisis prevention within the research efforts of the Desegregation Unit; (d) describing present efforts and state-of-the-art which will underline the understanding of the mechanisms and processes available for crisis prevention; and, (e) presentation of the NIE research priorities in this area. A discussion focusing on participants in and characteristics of the local school system which are crucial to understanding the dynamics of critical situations, suggests that there are four primary groups who need to be involved in any program to prevent critical incidents during the process of school desegregation. A need for a better information retrieval and dissemination system to improve the shared understanding of what are the effective strategies and methods for crisis prevention is addressed. The research agenda section concludes by stating that the rationale for the development of techniques in crisis prevention lies in the ability to transform the potential conflict ridden situation of school desegregation into a period of transition that ultimately benefits students, staff and community. (Author/AM)

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SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND CRISIS PREVENTION

A Position Paper and Research Agenda

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SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND CRISIS PREVENTION

Preface

This paper on the interrelations of school desegregation and crisis prevention is presented both as a position paper and the formulation of the research agenda for the Desegregation Studies Unit, National Institute of Education. It has as its basic purposes the following: 1) To identify and define the parameters of the issue area; 2) to place an understanding of this area within the context of the national desegregation efforts; 3) to present the rationale for the inclusion of crisis prevention within the research efforts of the Desegregation Studies Unit; 4) to describe present efforts and state-of-the-art which will underline our understanding of the mechanisms and processes available for crisis prevention; and 5) to present the NIE research priorities in this area.

The National Institute of Education (N.I.E.) was created by an Act of Congress in 1972. The Institute was given the mandate to attack critical problems in American education through research and development. In response to this mandate, N.I.E. has developed a strong research and problem oriented program responsive to the concerns of Congress, the educational community, and the lay public. N.I.E. has appropriately stated:

America's future is its children. The quality of education they receive, and the degree to which such schooling prepared them for later life will determine what the future will be.

In present discussions about school desegregation in the United States, there appears to be an inordinate amount of selective perception. School desegregation has come to be equated with busing and with protest. The discourse focuses upon the reactions, the protests, the picketing, the boycotts, the development of private white academies, and the reasons for "white flight." It appears many persons have as their only conception of school integration a tension ridden, violence prone effort at social change.

There is, of course, another story. In literally hundreds of communities across the nation, school desegregation has been achieved peacefully and has borne fruitful results. The promise of the Brown v. Board of Education decision from 1954 is being fulfilled time and again.

Having said this, it is yet apparent that there are instances where desegregation has provoked tension and, occasionally, resistance. While there is a need for all educators facing school desegregation to know and apply sound practices of crisis prevention, it is particularly important that such practices be operationalized in potential settings of conflict. Effectively meeting this challenge results in the protection of the learning environment and the continuation of the learning process. Where conflict and tension arise, the presence or absence of workable crisis prevention strategies may profoundly effect the outcome of the desegregation program.

It is in response to this need that the Desegregation Studies Unit will undertake a series of research efforts in crisis prevention.

It is our anticipated goal that we will be in a position to supply communities and local school systems with a variety of effective mechanisms to assist them in maintaining educational programs through a period of transition associated with the desegregation of their schools.

Topics and Terms: An Overview:

The rationale for the development of a research agenda in the area of crisis prevention is to better understand mechanisms and processes in order to assist and enhance efforts at school desegregation. The issue here is not whether this society should strive towards building an integrated public educational system, but rather, what are the means available to make it so. In this context, it is important that early on there be a discussion so as to focus our concerns.

The thrust of our efforts will be to assess the efficacy of various strategies and methods which may be enacted prior to and concurrent with the desegregation of a public school system in order that the educational process proceed. It is our belief, based on an assessment of a number of case studies of school desegregation, that if a school district can commence its desegregation program peacefully and continue so for the first few months of school without undue conflict, then many of the crisis frequently attributed to desegregation may be averted.

1. This is not to say, of course, that there are not many forces and dynamics at work in the society which are beyond the influence and control of the school system. Thus to assume that effective crisis prevention within the context of the school can be extrapolated to other sectors and institutional spheres is unwarranted. The forces at work in the desegregation process are multiple. Our interest here is in enhancing the opportunities within the school of creating viable educational settings.

Parenthetically the quest for "hard data" to back up these beliefs of a desirability for a calm and orderly opening of school as a boon to the possibilities for a successful integration program is a difficult one. What we have accumulated are the experiences, opinions, and natural histories of school personnel and desegregation experts who consistently shared with us this view. The written record is sketchy at best. It appears an imperative that in the future a means be developed to capture and record the assessment of various strategies, methods and processes. In this way the accounts of these discrete events in cities and town scattered across the country can be brought together and studied in their aggregate form.

It is neither new nor startling to suggest that there are any number of social issues in this society about which citizens disagree and which may lead to social conflict, either between individuals or between groups, organizations and associations. Frequently, one will find a broad consensus about the objectives or goals, but disagreement over the means to achieve them. Such is the case with issues of school desegregation. While there is overwhelming support in the nation for the notion that all children should have an equal opportunity to a quality education, there is considerable disagreement on precisely how that quality education is to be achieved. In short, the implementation of school desegregation may engender social conflict. Coser has defined social conflict as follows:

a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. Such conflicts may take place between individuals, between collectivities, or between individuals and collectivities.²

It is also evident from our study of American history that the public schools have been the scene of social conflicts almost the time of their creation in the late eighteenth century.³ Thus the current disputes over school desegregation must be placed in the context of the schools having been at the center of social conflict for nearly 200 years. Furthermore, school desegregation is but one of several issues that are now being contested in the schools, sex education, prayer, and science curriculum materials being but three examples.

In developing an understanding of conflict, it is essential that there is an ability to assess the nature of the crisis. Probably the key initial variable in understanding school crisis is the nature of the issues and the manner in which they are presented. Mark Chesler and Alan Guskin have developed a process list of questions which help in understanding the issues of the crisis

2. Coser, Lewis The Functions of Social Conflict. New York: The Free Press, 1956, p. 23.

3. cf. Greer, Colin, The Great School Legend. New York: Basic Books, 1972; Katz, Michael, Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971; Ravitch, Diane, The Great School Wars. New York: Basic Books, 1974.

and improving a diagnosis for the intervention. One might summarize their questions as follows:⁴

1. What are the issues being protested? Which are educational? Racial? Political? How are they related to external, non-educational issues?
2. What, in general, is the quality of education in this school (and community)? Are facilities and performance the same or different for black, chicano and white students?
3. What is the history of prior crisis? Were other attempts at presenting grievances tried? Have prior promises been broken? How did the original conflict escalate? What are students and community expectations about this situation compared to any previous crisis?
4. What is the level of organization of the protesting group? To what extent are the demands clearly articulated? To what extent are they able (or willing) to negotiate? Is negotiation relevant to their needs?
5. What is the group membership of the protesting community and students? What are the sympathies of those involved in the protest?

Although the language of these questions does not directly focus upon issues of school desegregation per se, their general nature can easily be applied in developing a method to diagnose the issues when a school system is in fact desegregating.

Another important area which needs to be analyzed is to what degree or extent is the turbulence or disruptions limited to the confines of the schools. The following four questions help to clarify what role, if any, outside influences beyond the school might play.

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4. Mark Chesler and Alan Guskin, Intervention in High School Crisis. (Unpublished paper, School of Education, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1970).

1. To what extent has the media dealt with the conflict?
2. To what extent have persons outside the school administration been involved in school decision-making? Has the school board held community meetings related to the crisis?
3. To what extent have youth or adults from the school been involved on any side? To what extent have the police been involved? To what extent have the teacher unions or associations been involved?
4. To what extent have political officials (e.g., the mayor) been involved in the situation?⁵

Chesler and Guskin provide an expanded explanation of this work.

The answer to these and similar questions help establish the limitations and design of the intervention and change strategy. For example, if turbulence is limited to the school, the consultant may be able to deal only with immediate educational issues. He might promote an all-day or weekend session with portions of the school in order to get some immediate actions by all parties that indicate good faith. Such immediate change might buy time so that major institutional changes can be considered and initiated. On the other hand, if disturbances have gone beyond the "four walls" of the school, the consultant may have to deal with extra school parties in any change strategy.⁶ This may lead to a more comprehensive and difficult intervention.

5. Ibid., pg. 10-11.

6. Ibid., pg. 10-11.

Three other groups also need to be accounted for in studies of crisis prevention. The nature of the level of their involvement is critical to the height the crisis may rise. Two of these are the school board and the school administration. The level of ambiguity of issues can be lessened through the active work of these persons. This effort can help thwart an increase in critical incidents. However, since school desegregation is very much a political issue today, an understanding of the involvement of a third group, the politically active leaders in the school desegregation process, is also critical to the analysis. Schools do not live in a political vacuum as once was perceived. Education is no longer considered to be a⁷ apolitical. Therefore, the strategies and processes used to avoid crisis before and during school desegregation must take into account the whole structure of the community.

These last paragraphs have discussed a variety of participants in and characteristics of the local school system which are crucial in understanding the dynamics of critical situations. Thus it is possible to better develop strategies for preventing crisis and conflict prior to and during school desegregation. From many conversations with practitioners and researchers, it appears there are four primary groups who need to

7. Michael Kirst, State, Schools, and Politics. Cambridge Mass.: Lexington Books, 1972. Ray C. Rist, "Race, Policy and Schooling, Society. Vol. 12. No. 1, 1974.

be involved in any program to prevent critical incidents during the process of school desegregation. These are, as discussed previously, students, school staff, school administration, and the community, which includes two groups of persons, the parents and the general citizenry with primary focus on those with decision-making authority.

Crisis Prevention: Current Efforts

Present efforts to achieve educational opportunity for all children in this country have necessitated the implementation of a number of strategies of school desegregation. Particularly when involving busing, these efforts are the focus of public reaction and resistance, both within and out of the school. In the midst of disruption and disturbances to the very process of education, there is little one can turn to in the way of research to suggest ways of preventing such occurrences. Essentially, little is known of the strategies, methods and processes one might implement to ensure the on-going viability of the educational program. Some work as already mentioned has been conducted in the areas of conflict intervention and resolution, but this has been primarily oriented towards the application of methods to already existing situations. Little is known on how one anticipates such occurrences and works to prevent them.

Basic to the understanding and development of strategies for crisis prevention is a knowledge of both past success stories of various school districts and the present efforts underway. The

impression that there have not been successes in school desegregation is surely a part of the problem of the current public image of school desegregation. Many districts over the past twenty years have received court orders and only a very few have had problems to merit more than local attention. Furthermore, there have been literally hundreds of voluntary desegregation programs begun in the school systems across the country.

It does not appear implausible to assume that if we knew more of successful and peaceful desegregation efforts, those parents, children, teachers, and school administrators now beginning desegregation would not be so apprehensive. It is in the absence of knowing the positive that one is left with the images of controversy and protest in those cities currently dominating the national media.

In our efforts to gain information on current efforts now underway, it has become apparent that the vast majority of the programs in operation are those related to staff training. There appear to be few mechanisms now employed which involve the parents and community. The focus is almost exclusively on the training of the teachers with skills in human relations. The stress is strongly towards interracial communications and interpersonal cooperative behavior. Only occasionally have we found instances of curriculum training and reorientation. Overall, the numbers of persons involved, both as trainers and teachers, appears to be quite small. The efforts are seemingly uncoordinated between districts, thus at best producing

a checkerboard approach to the question of responding in an effective and creative way to the desegregation of the schools.

It can be summarized that at a national level, the amount of available material is quite limited. This is not to say that there are not perhaps many school districts with quite viable crisis prevention plans and programs. It is just that without a systematic national collection procedure, the data remain fragmentary. Furthermore, this hinders and makes difficult the sharing of plans and procedures between districts. Each is frequently left on its own to rediscover what information and techniques are available. Clearly, there is a need for a better information retrieval and dissemination system to improve our shared understanding of what are the effective strategies and methods for crisis prevention. It cannot have but a beneficial outcome to make these materials available to those personnel actively involved in the efforts of school desegregation.

PART 11

CRISIS PREVENTION: THE RESEARCH AGENDA

In the process of formalizing the research agenda on crisis prevention, there are several points on crisis and conflict that we believe must be made explicit. First, we do not assume that all conflict and crisis per se is negative and destructive in its impact. Rather, we assume that conflict and crisis have the potential for either constructive or destructive outcomes. If the participants are not satisfied with the results, and if the causes for the conflict are not resolved, then the potential for a continued cycle of conflict that becomes increasingly destructive is both plausible and probable. On the other hand, if the participants in the conflict come to believe that there has been an equitable resolution of the issues and that all sides were dealt with fairly and honestly, then the positive benefits become manifest.

It is our view that the rationale for the development of techniques in crisis prevention lies in the ability to transform the potential conflict ridden situation of school desegregation into a period of transition that ultimately benefits students, staff, and community. We do not assume that our schools are tranquil social institutions where conflicts and crisis are unknown. Frequently, just the opposite. But it is our conviction

that precious little is known and done to work with the conflicts in schools in such a manner that the outcome is the enhancement rather than the destruction of the learning community. As Orfield has noted in this regard:

The advent of desegregation is such a crisis for many teachers and administrators. It can also be the opportunity for the initiation of very important educational reforms in circumstances where reforms are normally very difficult.

As has been noted earlier in this paper, there is a glaring paucity of data and information on effective means of dealing with crisis and conflict during the process of school desegregation. And though in city after city efforts have been made to cope with the situation, we can find little documented evidence and analysis of the relative effectiveness and success of various strategies, methods, tactics and procedures for crisis prevention. It is also our belief that the failure to provide the dissemination of what is known necessitates the repetition of successful as well as unsuccessful efforts, each as if it were a totally unique set of circumstances.

In response to these conditions the Desegregation Studies of NIE is assuming a four part responsibility in the area of crisis

8. Orfield, Gary "How to Make Desegregation Work: The Adoption of Schools to their Newly-Integrated Student Bodies," Law and Contemporary Problems. Vol. 39, No. 2 (Spring, 1975). p. 340.

prevention. They are 1) To sponsor research to collect existing methods, strategies, and procedures for crisis prevention as well as to identify those persons with the expertise and skill to effectively mediate crisis situations. 2) To sponsor the development of case studies of various school systems which have been involved in school desegregation and which have used one or more strategies for crisis prevention. 3) To support the implementation and subsequent evaluation of several clearly delineated approaches to crisis prevention in selected school districts during their period of desegregation. 4) To support the dissemination of research findings to school systems, administrators, staff, and others interested in effecting an orderly transition into the desegregation process.

We have tried with this agenda to avoid rediscovering the wheel. Rather, we feel it is imperative, due to the salience of the topic, that we gain a better and more systematic understanding of the dynamics of school crisis during the desegregation process.

Sensitizing Questions for Research Areas:

What follows is a variety of questions we believe are indicative of the important issues in crisis prevention to study and to which serious analysis must be given. This list is by no means exhaustive. Rather, it is offered to provide a sense of the thrusts for new efforts that we find most promising.

1) Review of Existing Research and Knowledge

- a. Is there any literature in this area that could be studied in order to assess the validity of various strategies?
- b. What do we know of the transportability of strategies from one setting to another?
- c. Has there been identified a series of steps to be taken by school districts to begin efforts at crisis prevention? What are they?
- d. What role is there for the use of outside assistance, both in terms of funding and personnel?
- e. Does there exist a need for the development of the coordination of outside assistance to school districts in their process of crisis prevention? Perhaps more basically, what outside assistance is in fact available and on what conditions?
- f. Are there groups in local communities who are particularly important and should be involved in the crisis prevention process?
- g. Does there exist an assessment of the "lead time" necessary for the successful implementation of a crisis prevention program in a school district or at an individual school site?

2) The Development of Case Histories

- a. Which cities are the most representative of the different categories of school desegregation (court ordered, HEW compliance,

voluntary, etc.) and would thus provide a broad base of information and knowledge that is beneficial to the development of strategies for crisis prevention?

b. In the analysis of the various cities selected for study, what are the commonalities and differences in the various stages or series of events that run from pre-litigation to the implementation of a school desegregation program? What do both the commonalities and differences suggest as to important considerations in the development of crisis prevention strategies?

c. If one delineates the stages as follows: 1) background and development of the law suit, compliance order, etc.; 2) litigation and negotiation process; 3) the decree or agreement on parameters and form of the desegregation to occur; 4) the "inbetween" time from the decree to implementation; and 5) the implementation of the desegregation process, the question is can one identify various intervention strategies or procedures applicable at one or more of these stages?

d. Have there been societal or historical changes in the process of school desegregation between the mid 1960's and the mid 1970's that necessitate a rethinking of current practices and procedures?

e. What commonalities and differences arise from present efforts and those documented by such groups as the United States Commission on Civil Rights, NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, National

Center for Policy Review, etc.? With the movement of desegregation efforts into the North, is school desegregation and its means of implementation taking on a different cast and set of realities in terms of developing crisis prevention strategies?

Though questions such as the following could only be asked towards the end of the period in which the case histories are being developed, it is well to indicate what we believe to be the important synthesizing foci to emphasize in any assessment across sites.

- a. What factors seem to lead a system/city towards a crisis situation before and during school desegregation?
- b. What factors seem to inhibit the emergence of a crisis situation before and during school desegregation?
- c. What sets of basic strategies and processes were/were not implemented by the school system to deal with crisis prevention?
- d. Are there specified tasks and roles to be played by various individuals and groups both within and without the school system during the early stages of school desegregation so as to implement a successful crisis prevention program?
- e. What support mechanisms and in what form need they be supplied to teachers, principals, and other administrators? For what

duration? When? By whom?

f. Does there exist a time frame for the process of crisis prevention?

g. When are activities to be phased in and when can they be phased out?

3) Implementation and Evaluation Research

The concern in this facet of the research agenda is to both implement and evaluate in schools and communities a variety of strategies, processes, and methods to curtail, prevent, and avert crises which might arise from the advent of school desegregation. The goal is to learn of mechanisms to minimize the disruptions of the educational programs in school systems and to effect an orderly and fruitful transition to an integrated school environment.

a. What was the course of events that brought about the beginning of school desegregation? What is the environment in which decisions and daily activities must necessarily be monitored prior to and during the desegregation process to prevent crisis? Which of these appear most amenable to intervention? Which appear least amenable?

c. For elementary, junior high, and secondary schools, what are the various forms of involvement necessary with staff, students, administration, parents, and community residents to avoid crisis? At what levels are there needs for extra-

curricular activities, curriculum development, grievance procedures, rumor control, security planning, new communication systems, inservice training, transportation planning, and new transfer policies (to name a few)?

d. It appears self-evident that for different levels of schools, with different segments of the community, and with different origins of the school desegregation process, different intervention procedures would be more appropriate. Which strategies appear most beneficial? When? What are the criteria for positing a good match between situation and procedures?

e. What are the step by step processes for each phase of crisis prevention work? Are there any "rules of thumb" to be followed?

f. How, when, and with whom are strategies and procedure worked out for the following:

- transportation
- curricular offerings
- grievance procedures
- extra curricular activities
- parent organizations/community involvement
- long term educational planning
- in-service training
- community relations
- support mechanisms for school employees
- security
- student involvement

g. What is to be the role and means of participation in crisis prevention for each of the following groups:

- community leaders
- elected officials
- school administration
- parents
- students
- teachers
- community residents
- security personnel (state, local, school)
- press and media
- outside consultants/experts

As we noted at the beginning of this part of the paper, it is our view that the rationale for the development of techniques in crisis prevention lies in the ability to transform the potential conflict ridden situation of school desegregation into a period of transition that ultimately benefits students, staff, and community. Not to undertake these activities, it appears to us, only exacerbates the present difficulties and results in a set of circumstances where school districts are left in a vacuum to devise methods and procedures. And if we are to move beyond an infinite number of rediscoveries of the wheel, it is imperative that a systematic and coordinated effort to be undertaken to gather, evaluate and disseminate our best data and analysis of processes of crisis prevention. Such is the goal of this present effort.